



# Naval Safety Center

## LESSONS LEARNED



LL 21-12

### ANIMAL-RELATED INJURIES

**"If you hold a cat by the tail you learn things you cannot learn any other way."**

**— Winston Churchill**

Animal injuries to Navy and Marine Corps personnel are not as common as, say, auto accidents, but a Naval Safety Center study found they have cost the naval services at least \$1.1M from FY 2016 through 2020. That's an average of \$221K per year. Dog-related injuries alone cost the Navy \$526,617 during the study period, with 247 (66%) of the total animal mishaps. Dog bites specifically account for the most injuries at 114 (30.8%). Don't have a dog? Read on, because, of the 370 animal-related mishaps in the study period, 170 weren't dogs (some pets, some not). We'll hold off on the sharks and crocs stories for a future lesson, but we have examples of other pets and "presumed" pets to illustrate how we should be wary around our feathered and furry friends. As always, we ask that you read *and learn* from others' animal encounters that ended painfully.

*Note: No animals were harmed in the learning of these lessons; only humans.*



- A Sailor was walking her dog when SQUIRREL! Yes, the dog darted after a squirrel, pulling the Sailor off balance. She put her arm out to break her fall, dislocating her shoulder in the process. — *We hope she used her 30 days on light duty to read up on leash training for her dog.*
- In another dog versus arm mishap, a Sailor was walking his dog with the leash wrapped around his hand when the dog took off. The report doesn't say if the incident was squirrel-inspired, but the force was enough to break the Sailor's hand. — *Some leash technique and dog-walking training may be in order for this pet and owner too. When dog-walking, you've got to stay alert to be able to respond.*
- A Marine was walking a friend's dog, when the leash became tangled around his leg, causing him (*the Marine, not the dog*) to fall down a flight of 12 concrete stairs. He injured his shoulder, collarbone, right hip, and lost consciousness. — *We are surprised at how many "dogs and stairs" mishap reports are in the system. Please be even more careful when you are not on flat ground.*
- A Sailor "received [a] personal dog bite while at home." We get what that statement was supposed to mean, but it reads like he got his very own personal bite (*aww. How cute!*). The Sailor thought the bite was superficial and treated it with antibiotic ointment until ten days later when it showed signs of infection. — *He required "personal" medical intervention to clean the wound and spent 30 days on light duty. If you get an animal bite, please have a medical professional look at it promptly.*
- A Sailor was at a family BBQ, and all the dogs were playing in the yard. One of the dogs tried to attack her dog, and when she broke them up, she was bitten, requiring stitches. — *The report recommends leashes when multiple dogs are together. We agree. See the Key Takeaways for more.*
- A Sailor approached his dog while it was sleeping. The dog was startled and bit the Sailor in the face. — *The details are scant on the extent of the bite, but the sleep-disturbing Sailor spent four days on light duty. He experienced firsthand the old saying, "let sleeping dogs lie." If you are going to wake them up, maybe don't put your face so close.*

- A Sailor tried to high-five a monkey. The monkey high-fived him back, then jumped on the Sailor's shoulder and bit him on his right arm. Then came intravenous immunoglobulin and nine shots for rabies, tetanus, etc. The report doesn't mention if alcohol was involved (*by the Sailor or by the monkey*). — SMH. Do we really need to say anything here?



- A Sailor attempted to pet a stray cat ... cat bit Sailor ... Sailor joined the preceding Sailor with the rabies protocol.



- A Sailor's pet parrot bit him on the lip, requiring three stitches. — No word if the parrot cursed, apologized, laughed, or sang a sea shanty, but 'Blackbeard' definitely learned about boundaries.

- Service member (SVM) sees rabbit outside of the bachelor quarters ... attempts to feed rabbit ... rabbit bites SVM's hand. — This mishap demonstrates that rabbits (and other wild animals) don't know the saying "don't bite the hand that feeds you." Watch out, they've got "nasty, big, pointy teeth!"

## Key Takeaways / Lessons Learned

No matter the cuteness factor, some animals may not behave the way we'd expect, especially if they're not domesticated. Any animal can bite regardless of size, disposition, or breed. Most bites are preventable, and there are things you can do to help prevent them. When it comes to dogs, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) offers these tips to avoid bites. We've translated a few to apply to other animals too.

1. **Socializing your pet helps your dog feel at ease in different situations.** By introducing your dog to people and other animals while it is a puppy, it feels more comfortable in different situations as it gets older. It is also essential to use a leash in public to make sure you can control your dog. Until such time it may be practical to muzzle a dog on a leash if you're not sure how it will respond to people you encounter (*Not our idea; it's from the AVMA*).

2. **Follow the "basics" of responsible pet ownership.** The basics of responsible dog ownership that can help reduce the risk of dog bites include carefully selecting the dog that is right for your family, proper training, regular exercise, and neutering or spaying your pet.

3. **Avoid Risky Situations.** It's important to know how to avoid escalating risky situations and understand when you should and should not interact with dogs. Follow this advice:

- If the dog is not with its owner, be leery.
- If the dog is with its owner, don't interact unless the owner gives permission.
- If the dog is on the other side of a fence, don't reach through or over the fence to pet the dog.
- If a dog is sleeping, eating, sick, or injured, leave it alone.
- If a dog is playing with a toy and doesn't want to share, don't try.
- If a dog is growling or barking, that's a clue.
- If a dog appears to be hiding or seeking time alone, then let it.
- If you must break up a dog fight, sources recommend pulling the dog by its hind legs (look up the "wheelbarrow method." It removes their leverage to fight, and it keeps you away from the teeth.

4. **Educate yourself (and your kids) about how – or whether – to approach an animal.** In the case of wild animals or any unfamiliar pets, the "do not approach" method is probably the best.

**And remember, Don't high-five the monkey.**

**"Hey ... Let's be careful out there."**